

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN 2003-2004

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Introduction

In 2001, there were an estimated 1.5 million people in Ontario with self-disclosed disabilities. This number is expected to increase as the population ages.

In December 2001, the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) was passed into law. Its purpose is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

One of the requirements under the ODA is that Ontario government ministries, municipalities, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities, and public transportation organizations develop annual accessibility plans to make programs, services and buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The plans must be made available to the public.

In the Speech from the Throne, delivered on November 20, 2003, the Ontario Government confirmed its commitment to working with Ontarians with disabilities on meaningful legislation that will allow them to fully participate in building a stronger province.

This document is the first annual accessibility plan for the Ministry of the Environment. The plan describes improvements to accessibility that the ministry has made to date and its commitments for the balance of the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

Report on Achievements

In January 2003, the ministry established a working group with representation from all major program areas to lead the development and implementation of the Accessibility Plan and integrate accessibility improvements into the ministry's business planning. In June 2003, the group conducted a workshop with ministry staff including many with disabilities. The valuable information obtained through the workshop included successes in removing barriers and provides a basis for developing strategies to meet our accessibility goals.

Over 80 per cent of ministry managers and supervisors have completed training in fulfilling the government's obligations to accommodate the accessibility needs of employees and job applicants who have disabilities.

The ministry's 2003 – 2004 capital plan has been reviewed to ensure that no project creates barriers for employees or citizens with disabilities.

The ministry has been actively working for a number of years to remove physical barriers in its facilities and applies a number of criteria to ensure new projects are barrier free. Achievements include:

Plans to upgrade existing facilities or for proposed facilities meet or exceed the Ontario Realty Corporation Guide to Barrier-Free Design for Ontario Government Buildings and the Ontario Building Code.

Automated push button door openers at primary building entrances.

Ramps for wheelchairs and scooters.

Barrier-free washrooms with grab bars.

Lever-type door handles in new facilities.

Braille elevator buttons installed in the ministry's head office.

Ergonomic assessments carried out on request.

Measures to accommodate the specific needs of individual employees are routinely implemented. For example, the carpet was removed from the office of an employee with asthma, and a teletypist was hired to enable a deaf employee to fully participate in a branch meeting. The ministry's employment accommodation practices meet the policy for employment accommodation issued by Management Board Secretariat.

Ministry Internet sites have been made accessible to people with disabilities. The Environmental Registry was made accessible on December 11, 2002. Work is underway to convert historical notices (Instrument Decision Notices older than November 1, 2002) to a more accessible format. Key ministry staff has been trained on how to create accessible documents for postings and guidelines are available to assist all ministry staff in this. The July 2003 issue of eMOE, the electronic monthly staff newsletter, contained an article on ODA and on disability awareness. Procedures are in place to provide ministry publications in accessible formats, upon request.

In September 2003, the ministry's Human Resources Branch staff were trained on their responsibilities and obligations under the ODA.

The accommodation needs of job candidates are addressed during the interviewing and hiring process. Interviews are held in accessible locations and interview and testing procedures are adjusted to meet candidates' needs. A software program has been installed to assist candidates who are blind or visually impaired or candidates can bring their own computer to the interview. Questions can be provided in large print. A sign language interpreter can also be available for interviews. Candidates are provided extra time to complete tests and interviews.

Ministry programs have measures in place to accommodate people with disabilities. For example, applicants for a pesticides licence can take the examination orally, if writing presents a barrier. More time is given to those with learning disabilities to write exams for pesticide licences and Drive Clean test facilities.

Requests for Proposals include requirements for accessibility. For instance, a request to house MOE employees during training sessions included the need for the location to be accessible.

The ministry improved its smog notification system by adding fine particulate matter (PM2.5) to its Air Quality Index to give everyone, especially those who are more vulnerable to poor air quality - such as children, people with asthma and the elderly - better information to protect their health.

The ODA Lead has been working with other ODA Leads within the OPS to share best practices and ODA strategies.

The ministry has an ODA Web page on its Intranet site to provide readily available and fully accessible resources to inform and educate staff across the province about the ministry's accessibility goals and

actions. This site includes an electronic suggestion box to provide an opportunity for staff to comment and identify barriers in their workplace. A hub mail sent to all ministry staff announced the launch of the Intranet site.

Commitments and Strategies for 2003-2004

The ministry will continue to build on its successes in removing architectural barriers in its facilities by conducting a detailed survey of all ministry locations to identify physical barriers and develop plans to remove these barriers.

Methods to be taken to prevent new barriers

During the 2003-2004 fiscal year, the Ministry of the Environment will increase staff awareness of accessibility planning and continue to incorporate accessibility into the way we do business. The ministry's accessibility statement is the cornerstone of moving toward full accessibility.

Proposed new acts, regulations, policies, programs and services will be assessed for their impact on people with disabilities to prevent creating new barriers.

The ministry's accessibility goals and objectives will be incorporated into management performance agreements.

Staff will be educated on the ODA, its requirements and the ministry's accessibility plan.

The online ODA Training for Managers will be made available to all staff.

Managers and supervisors will complete training on accommodating the accessibility need of employees and job applicants with disabilities.

Program managers and supervisors will be given guidance on considering accessibility in all procurement activities. All staff responsible for procurement will receive and implement the Guidelines of Implementing the Procurement Provisions of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Contracts with service providers will include provisions to ensure accessibility requirements are met.

The ministry will continue to ensure its Internet sites are accessible by testing all new site content.

Staff will be given the procedures for responding to requests for publications in accessible formats.

Business areas to be reviewed

Acts and Regulations

The ministry will consider accessibility issues in the development and review of Acts and regulations come up for review.

Policies and Programs

Review 1-800 telephone services to identify priorities for providing TTY access.

Review wording on facilities management request forms to ensure the needs of employees with disabilities are accommodated quickly so they can perform their duties easily and safely.

Practices and Services

The ministry will review the documents it issues to members of the public, such as Provincial Officers Orders, to identify issues of accessibility.

The ministry will review its use of acronyms to identify improvements to ensure public documents can be more easily understood.

The ministry will assess the need for front-line staff to be trained in customer service for people with disabilities.

Actions to be taken

In the coming year, the ministry will:

Barrier Identification and Prevention

Evaluate for accessibility any Acts and regulations that come up for review.

Put measures in place to ensure that training programs provided by the ministry and service providers are accessible to people with disabilities.

Develop and implement enhanced emergency notification and evacuation procedures to ensure the safety of people with disabilities.

Incorporate the ministry's accessibility goals and objectives into all management performance agreements.

Include provisions in contracts with service providers to ensure accessibility requirements are met.

Develop guidelines for staff planning meetings and presentations to ensure that locations are accessible and information is available in appropriate formats.

Make the online ODA Training for Managers available to all staff.

Provide an opportunity for staff to contribute to the ODA webpage and the electronic staff newsletter, to provide their ongoing perspective of how accessibility planning can enhance participation and contribution in the workplace.

The Working Group will communicate at least once a month to review progress and to develop strategies to move forward on removing barriers and integrating accessibility planning into the ministry's business planning cycle.

The 2004 – 2005 capital plan will be reviewed to ensure that no new project creates barriers for employees or citizens with disabilities.

Improved accessibility in communications

Post a notice on the ministry's website advising the public that all ministry publications can be provided in alternate formats upon request and provide instructions on how to obtain them.

Develop guidelines for planning and hosting open houses, public meetings, etc. to ensure that all interested persons are able to fully participate.

Include information on the ODA, its requirements and the ministry's accessibility plan in the orientation package for new staff.

Improved accessibility of facilities

Work with the Ontario Realty Corporation to ensure that lease renewals and new acquisitions are accessible.

Educate design consultants to ensure the Ontario Realty Corporation Guide to Barrier Free Design for Ontario Government Buildings and the Ontario Building Code are met and/or exceeded where possible.

Work with landlords of MOE facilities to implement measures such as audible floor identification in elevators, to remove barriers identified in the detailed survey of all ministry locations.

Implement a barrier prevention approach when acquiring new facilities or renovating existing facilities.

Develop and begin to implement a program to extend ergonomic assessments to all MOE staff.

Improved accessibility in technology

Upgrade software on all staff workstations to enable creation of accessible documents.

For more information

Questions or comments about the ministry's accessibility plan are always welcome. Please phone:

General inquiry number: 416-325-4000

TTY number: 1-800-387-5559

1-800 number: 1-800-565-4923

E-mail: picemail@ene.gov.on.ca

Ministry website address: www.ene.gov.on.ca

Visit the Ministry of Citizenship's Accessibility Ontario web portal at:

<http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>. The site promotes accessibility and provides information and resources on how to make Ontario a barrier-free province.

Alternate formats of this document are available free upon request from:

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